

Jigsaw of Stiggins' Chapter 6: Essay Assessment

Learning Targets:

1. Students will understand when it is appropriate to use an essay as an assessment tool (concept).
2. Students will begin to be able to write clear and concise essay questions appropriate for their subject area (skill).
3. Students will understand the scoring options specific to essay assessments (checklists, holistic rubrics, and analytical rubrics) (concept).

Guided Reading Teaching Tool: Anticipation Guide:

1. Essays are a good way to assess all knowledge levels: true or false?
2. There are three types of essay scoring options: the checklist, the holistic rubric, and the analytical rubric: agree or disagree?
3. Essay assessment is a completely objective way to evaluate knowledge learned: yes or no?

Foundations of Essay Assessment (pp.135-136)

When to use it: Two things to consider:

1. Is the context right? (Are my students able to accurately communicate their ideas in writing? e.g. ELL or special needs)
2. Do I have enough time? (Writing essay assessments takes little time, but scoring is time intensive)

Matching Methods to Target (pp.137-145)

Knowledge and Understanding: Selected response formats generally provide a more efficient means of assessment, but essay works well when it is the relationship among ideas that are key. Essays can help evaluate students master of these relationships.

Reasoning: Essays are a strong match to assessing reasoning. When students describe their process of reasoning, we can infer the state of their understanding and ability to problem-solve.

Performance: Essays can be used to assess student attainment of building blocks of performance skill competence. But observing the actual performances is generally a better assessment.

Product: Essays can be used to provide insights into student's prerequisite knowledge that leads to the creation of quality products. But, being able to write about a quality product and being able to produce it are two different things.

Essays can be used as products in themselves, but it is important to be clear about what you are assessing: Is it the content of a student's response or their ability to write well?

Developing Essay Assessments (pp.141-149)

Designing and developing these assessments involves three steps:

1. Assessment planning
2. Exercise development
3. Scoring guide development

Assessment Planning: Begin with clearly articulated achievements targets. Then, create an essay table of specifications or objectives.

Exercise Development: To succeed with this assessment format, we must invest thoughtful preparation time in writing exercises that challenge respondents by describing a single complete and novel task. Sound exercises do 3 things:

1. Specify the knowledge students are supposed to command in preparing a response.
2. Specify the kind(s) of reasoning or problem solving respondents are to carry out. Be clear about what respondents are to write about.
3. Point the direction to an appropriate response without giving away the answer. Good exercises literally list the key elements of a good response without cueing the unprepared examinee on how to succeed.

Developing Essay Scoring Procedures: There are three ways to score essays:

1. **The Checklist:** points are awarded when specific ingredients appear in a student's answer.
2. **Holistic Scoring Rubric:** Achievement is determined along a continua: an overall scale defines a student's level of mastery.
3. **Analytical Scoring Rubric:** Each component of an essay is given points along a continua separate from other components.

Barriers to a Sound Essay Assessment

- Lack of Target Clarity
- Lack of writing proficiency on part of respondents
- Inadequate sample of exercises
- Poor quality exercises/scoring

Examples of Bad Essay Questions:

1. Write 1,000 words discussing religion in France in the 17th century.
2. Genetic engineering is highly controversial. Write a 5-paragraph-essay about the ethical issues surrounding genetic engineering.
3. We have just finished reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Write an essay explaining how you felt after reading novel.
4. We have just learned about photosynthesis. Write an essay about why we need photosynthesis.
5. Write an essay comparing and contrasting Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen.

Examples of Good Essay Questions:

1. Considering what you have learned about the causes of water pollution in urban areas, write an 3-4 page essay proposing three possible solutions to this problem. Make sure to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each of your proposals.
2. Heroes are defined by who they are and what they do. Throughout the novel, *When My Name Was Keoko*, Uncle and Abuji resist the Japanese in both subtle and direct ways. In a 5-paragraph-essay explain how either Uncle or Abuji could be viewed as a hero and why. Be sure to support each of your ideas with evidence from the novel.
3. We have watched several important films about race and the civil rights movement in the United States including *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *In the Heat of the Night*, and *Little Big Man*. In approximately 1,000 words, discuss how each of these films comments on racial tensions in American society by describing a memorable scene from each film. In your essay, be sure to consider specific characters and their roles, the intended audience of the film, and the time period in which it first appeared on screen.
4. In our reading of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, we have been exploring the theme of existentialism. In our discussions about the text, we have noticed Camus' use of the motif of sun, light and heat. In a well-developed essay, analyze Camus' use of this motif to develop the existential theme of the novel. Be sure to include specific examples from the text to support your arguments.
5. Many theorems in geometry can help us solve everyday problems. In 1-2 paragraphs, describe how you would use the Pythagorean theorem to find the height of a ladder resting on the side of a building. Write your answer in a step by step manner, citing the Pythagorean theorem when you use it.

Short Response Questions and Short Answer Quiz:

Circle the best response. Is the statement below true or false?

1. Having the scoring criteria clearly in mind before evaluating is the single biggest time saver.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. What is the benefit of doing the work that you assign to students yourself?
3. When we assess essays, we can judge which of the following qualities of that work:
 - a) whether the work conveys accurate knowledge and understanding
 - b) whether it uses that knowledge in a manner that represents sound reasoning
 - c) whether it manifests the characteristics of effective written communication
 - d) all of the above

- e) none of the above
- f) two of the above (which?)

4. According to Stiggins, is it advisable to finishing grading one essay before moving on to the next? Why?

5. Stiggins advises keeping the identities of the student anonymous when grading:

- a) True
- b) False

6. You are a teacher with a high number of ELL students in your class. You've just covered highly conceptual content, say, the function of the division of power in American government. It seems to have gone well, you've had good student participation and lively discussions in this unit. You want your students to succeed and think they can. What an essay be an appropriate assessment tool?